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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003148

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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: PUK-PJAK CONFRONTATION IN SULAIMANIYAH

Classified By: Classified By Regional Coordinator Jess Baily for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

1. (C) SUMMARY: With approval of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the Deputy Commander for Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga said he recently deployed 200 PUK Peshmerga soldiers to take military action against members of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan Party (PJAK) in the Penjwin and Sangasar districts of Sulaimaniyah Province, Iraqi Kurdistan. Iranian authorities had attacked PJAK forces in Iraqi Kurdistan in retaliation for the deaths of two Iranian soldiers. As a result of the border fighting over the last four weeks, an estimated 500 Kurdish border villagers fled their homes. Iraqi Kurdish military officials said PJAK members are not allowed to leave their base in the Qandil Mountain area. END SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

2. (C) IPAO met with General Mustapha Said Qadir, Deputy Commander for PUK Peshmerga, and General Nabaz Ahmed Abdullah, the Head of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense Intelligence Service, Sulaimaniyah branch, on September 9 in Sulaimaniyah. General Qadir recalled that in 1993, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK a.k.a. KADEK, Kongra-Gel and KCK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) ceased armed conflict and agreed that the PKK would stay away from the Badinan area of Dahuk Province near Turkey. In exchange, Qadir continued, the PKK would settle in the Qandil Mountain, Sharazur district. (Note: the Qandil Mountain straddles Sulaimaniyah and Erbil Provinces and borders Iran). He claimed the KRG, GOT, Government of Iraq (GOI), Government of Syria, and the USG approved the arrangement.

2. (C) Qadir told IPAO that Qandil Mountain is now home to 3,000 PKK and PKK-affiliated Kurdish groups, including 1,000 PJAK or Partiya Jiyana Azada Kurdistan, who are Iranian Kurds armed and funded by the PKK. The funding sources of PKK, Qadir noted, include rich individual donors, business deals and investment projects such as a satellite station and foreign governments, e.g. Iraq, Syria, and Iran. If the PJAK leaves the Qandil Mountain, Qadir continued, it receives an unspecified warning as in the case last month when approximately 150 of its members went to the Iranian-Iraqi border area in Sulaimaniyah Province and 20 engaged with PUK Peshmerga forces.

PJAK ATTACKS

3. (C) On August 16, shelling and attacks on border villages started in the Penjwin and Sangaser districts of Sulaimaniyah

Province. General Nabaz said that Iranian authorities were pursuing PKK and PJAK fighters. He noted that PJAK had clashed with Iraqi border police and killed two Iranian soldiers which prompted the Iranians to attack. On August 27-28, with KRG approval approximately 200 PUK Peshmergas of the Sharazur and Penjwin districts were deployed to fight the PJAK, Nabaz added. The PUK Peshmerga tried to negotiate with the PJAK, he continued, before shooting started which resulted in one injured Peshmerga; there were no casualties and the PJAK left the area and have not returned.

THE TIMING OF PJAK ATTACKS

¶4. (C) August 2007 marked the first time villagers had to leave because of fighting between the Iranian forces and PJAK. (Note: the Iranians dropped flyers to warn villagers in advance they were going to engage militarily with PJAK. End Note). Nabaz said fighting between Iranians and the approximately 150 PJAK members operating outside Qandil rendered the border area unstable. He asserted PJAK wanted also to weaken extremist Islamic parties in the area e.g. Alsar al-Sunna, Alsar al-Islam. Both military leaders did not believe an invasion into Iraqi Kurdistan by Iranian troops is foreseeable. Qadir added the Iraqi military is currently trying to draw the estimated 500 villagers back home (Note: Press reports have stated that as many as 3,000 villagers were displaced.)

¶5. (C) Nabaz noted that PJAK also moved out of Qandil because they believed Iran and Turkey would bomb them. The PJAK forces felt confined and targeted, he added. Moreover, the PJAK wanted to expand its area of operation and reduce Iranian armed force levels, he said. Nabaz senses the recent PJAK activity indicates the multilateral agreement to contain

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the PKK and PJAK in Qandil has weakened.

¶6. (C) Finally, according to Qadir and Nabaz, PJAK initiated military action to send a signal to the Iraqis that Iran is a force to be reckoned with in the region along side the United States. (Note: KRG Minister of Interior, Karim Sinjari, said on September 6 that Iran was "testing" both the KRG and the US military response. End note.)

THE BALANCE OF POWER -- IRAN, U.S., TURKEY

¶7. (C) Qadir told IPAO that he believes the Iranian authorities engage in border activity in Iraq to counter alleged USG support to PJAK. He said the USG does this to render Iran unstable. (Note: PJAK's leader is Germany-based Rahman Haji Ahmadi who visited Washington, DC last July and requested support from the USG but was refused.) To support the USG strategy, the PUK and KDP collect information on Iran, Qadir continued, through the KDP intelligence agency (Parastin) led by Masour Barzani and the counterterrorism group based in Sulaimaniyah headed by Bafel Talabani, sons of the KRG President Massoud Barzani and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

¶8. (C) Nabaz said that Iran and Turkey have an agreement whereby Iran can obtain support from Turkey to attack the PKK and PJAK. Iran and GOT also agreed, he continued, that if the U.S. attacks Iran, Turkey will not back the U.S. Nabaz added that Turkey sent 500 intelligence agents to the Iranian military compound (referred to as Khana) to conduct training, artillery exercises, and promote Turkish-Iranian cooperation. GOT also recently gave the Iranian government surveillance cameras with night vision for the border areas in exchange for intelligence, he added. GOT is using Iran to weaken the PKK, he continued, and keep its activities far from Turkey. Qadir said in the next five years, the Turkish and U.S. governments will change, but one thing is sure is that the Turkish military does not really want to solve the PKK or Kurdish problems. "The PKK is our disaster," he sighed.

SOLVING THE PKK ISSUE

19. (C) Qadir asserted the GOT needs to promote integration and political rights for the Turkish Kurds in a non-violent manner. The GOT should pass a resolution forgiving the PKK, he suggested, and then the PKK must be disarmed. The PKK, he continued, must alter their ideology from a focus on establishing a greater Kurdistan to becoming a legitimate part of the political process in Turkey through the normal election process. The PKK needs to capitalize on the 22 Kurdish members of the GOT parliament to become a legitimate political actor, Qadir stressed.

19. (C) COMMENT: Recent PJAK activity reveals a weakness in the PKK containment strategy in the Qandil Mountain base. Although an Iranian invasion is not presently foreseeable, Iraqi Kurdish military leaders are concerned that more resources are required to manage border security, which they consider a GOI function. The frequency of shelling and border attacks over the course of four weeks is unusual for Sulaimaniyah Province. Iran probably intends to use the threat of further border insecurity to influence KRG and USG policy on the PJAK and other issues. End Comment.
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